

Congressional Hispanic Caucus Chairman Joaquin Castro (TX-20)
Talking Points – Natural Resources Subcommittee Hearing on Establishing a
National Museum of the American Latino
Thursday, October 17th – 10:00 AM

I'd first like to thank Chairwoman Haaland and Chairman Grijalva for holding this historic hearing today, and Congressman Jose Serrano for his tireless work to establish a Latino Smithsonian.

Creating a stand-alone National Museum of the American Latino will allow us to celebrate the immeasurable contributions Latinos have made to American history and share these accomplishments with visitors from across the U.S. and around the world.

This museum has been in the works for a long time. In 1994, the Smithsonian Institution Task Force on Latino Issues published a report recommending the creation of a museum on the Latino experience and including Latinos at every level of leadership.

While over 20 years have gone by since those recommendations were made, a UCLA report earlier this year found that the Institution had largely failed to meet the recommendations. Since 1994, only four Hispanics have served in the Institute's Leadership. Despite Congress's efforts for the last 15 years, we still do not have a Latino museum.

Latinos make up almost 20% of the population in the US – nearly 60 million across all 50 states and the territories, including 11 million in my home state of Texas.

Latinos have defined decades of American music, arts, and culture. Latinos have served our country in uniform across all branches in the military. Latinos led the organizers and activists who fought for worker's rights and fair labor practices. Latinos have helped build America's thriving economy as innovators and entrepreneurs.

But our stories – our experiences – have been erased and forgotten from history. This erasure is silencing and invalidates the importance of our communities.

We can change that by establishing a National Museum of the American Latino.

In the last 20 years, the Smithsonian has taken steps to increase representation and diversity. On the national mall, our brothers and sisters in the Native American and African American communities have Smithsonian museums marking their history, their suffering, and their contributions to our nation.

These museums are examples of success and demonstrate how the simple act of representation here in Washington can bring pride to millions of Americans of color.

Now it's time for the Latino community to have the same honor and recognition in the heart of our nation's Capital.

Unfortunately, we are living at time when many Hispanic families are living in the shadows and in fear because of the anti-immigrant environment.

Now, more than ever, it is critical that we tell Hispanic stories and celebrate our culture.

My family, like so many, is a family of immigrants – and everything I have today is because of the sacrifices of my grandmother, who came to Texas as a young orphan.

Latinos are a community with a rich history here in the United States, and we stand strong. Latinos contribute every day to our nation's economy, culture, and arts. And our communities are instrumental to our nation's history and character.

With this bill, I know that one day we will establish a museum to honor our past, celebrate our present, and envision our future.

It's time to move forward, and I hope you all support Congressman Serrano's bill and call on the Smithsonian to establish the National Museum of the American Latino.